1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

175 642 came to Bornu—and who also came to be called Kanuri about this time—were the Sefuwa, their fellow Magumi clansmen and loyal followers, clients and slaves. The traditions declare that the leader who finally founded the new capital of Birni Ngazargamo curbed the power of his own nobles and insisted that all of them (except one who protected the western boundaries) should live in the capital, leaving subordinates to administer their fief-holdings.[7] It should also be remembered that 175 642 this newly formed Bornu kingdom (*ca.* 1450–1550 A.D.) tried to regain control over Kanem and many of its other lost vassal territories in the Chad Basin and the 648 southern desert. Thus they very quickly attacked and defeated Bilma 400 miles to the north of Lake Chad which was the center for the Saharan salt trade. They also had to defend the kingdom against raiding desert Tuareg and the rising power of Songhai in the west.

Kanem was a state organized around a confederacy of clans, with one clan and its leading lineage having a senior status. The migration of this leading group into Bornu helps to explain why the Bornu kingdom was more centralized than its 175 predecessor as a political system. In Bornu the Magumi Sefuwa had no other re- 64 lated clan or clan leaders to share power with; instead they were confronted by a group of pagan peoples spoken of under the general term of "Sô" in the traditions. Against these people they fought battles of conquest to establish their rule in the area and in the end absorbed many of them into a group known today as the Kanuri. It would have been much simpler to unify this one group under a leader who had no rival clan or clan leaders to cope with. Thus the new situation in Bornu 175 642 afforded both a stimulus and an opportunity for increased centralization of power in the political organization of the Kanuri state. It is against this growing centralization in the hands of the ruling monarch of Bornu that the following account of its structure should be gauged, for it is not always easy to portray change and development while describing how a society is organized.

Pre-nineteenth Century Bornu

175 643 At the head of the early Bornu state was the Mai or king. This office was hereditary in the male line, and all men whose fathers had been monarchs were eli- 646 gible for the succession. The Council of Nobles, and accounts vary as to who these were, chose the new monarch upon the death of the reigning one, although powerful rulers could obviously affect the choice. The royal office carried with it an aura of untouchability, remoteness, and sacredness. People referred to the Mai as "Master" using the term applied by slaves to their owners. People approached the royal cage in which the Mai was seated and prostrated themselves before the bars putting sand on their heads or going through the motions of doing so to indicate the humility and respect they felt in his presence.

175 649 Members of the royal family held titled offices. These included the monarch's own mother, his senior wife, and often a senior female relative, either a sister, half-sister, or more distant female relatives in the male line. The sons and

[7] A fief is a political unit within a state over which a superior has rights of tribute collection and political leadership (not necessarily exclusive rights) given to him by his or his ancestors' relationship to a monarch.

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

ma, who when he was in court, sat in front of the throne facing the same way as the Shehu between the two lines. This symbolized his semi-independent status as a holder of a large section of the kingdom rather than a set of fragmented fiefs. Thus the idea of a consolidated set of fief-holdings on the western boundary was maintained. There was a constant threat from the Fulani which made such a move politically expedient.

How much actual power this nineteenth-century court actually had is debatable. Obviously a few favorite advisers who had the ear of the monarch could become very powerful men during the period of their favor. However, who these were seems to have varied throughout the century. Indeed even a place in court might be gained by a very ambitious rural chief, if he appeared often enough and was able to please the monarch by his service and tributes. In the realm of the judiciary some significant changes occurred as well. Before the nineteenth century, as we have already noted, there was a chief judge, the Talba, who was ranked as "the second man" in the state. During the double regency at the beginning of the century, the first Shehu, Laminu, acted as his own chief judge. He was steeped in Koranic learning and is supposed to have had magical powers that enabled him to adjudicate even the most difficult of cases, harshly but with justice. Parenthetically, this power—and not his military acumen and leadership—is considered by the traditions to have been the chief reason why Laminu saved Bornu from the Fulani wars. Later in his rule, sometime in the 1820s, Shehu Laminu appointed two leading religious personages who came from the families of the leading Bornu religious practitioners to the new offices of Liman and Imam. The former took over the major duties of chief legal adviser to the Shehu, while the Imam became the chief religious practitioner in the state. The old Talba stayed with the court of the former dynasty, and after its demise the title became a lesser one in the judicial hierarchy which is where it stands today.

Punishments for misdemeanors were relatively harsh by contempory standards. Adultery on a Muslim holy day could bring 400 lashes to a man or 200 to a woman. It was believed that judges in the capital of Kuka actually set spies upon the populace in search of law breakers. Intentional murder was punishable by death, and the relatives of the dead man carried out the execution by stoning the murderer. Thieves who were repeatedly caught finally had a hand cut off or were tortured by being buried up to the neck, then having their heads buttered or honeyed and exposed above the ground to attract insects. Unpaid debts proven in court resulted in the confiscation of all the debtor's movable property and a fine to the court. The debtor was pinned to the ground by court officials until he consented to confiscation. However, if he obviously had no means at all, the judge dismissed the case with the words, "God send you the means."

All titled officials and even untitled followers of the Shehu could be given or they could inherit, at the pleasure of the Shehu, rights of revenue collection and administration in one or more settlements spread throughout the entire state. These fiefs were granted by the Shehu, nominal owner of all the land in the state. Generally speaking such rights were hereditary in the male line, but the Shehu could diminish or expand the holding of one fief-holder at the expense of another, and a new monarch was expected to patronize his own favorites. Any person holding a fief directly from the monarch was called a chima kura or "the big lord." There

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

came a very powerful group of chiefs through whom the kingdom was administered. When these men went to their districts, sometimes they had precolonial ties in these areas as big lords—some of the constituent towns in the district were their former fiefs; sometimes however they were complete strangers to the area. Besides this there was a constant shuffling of different district heads through transfers, dismissals, retirements, and deaths. The various village area heads under each district head were chosen on the basis of investigations conducted by the British colonial officials to find out who among the population had the hereditary right to leadership for a particular local settlement and its satellite communities. Very often there was no tie of previous loyalty between the village area head and the new district head. Previously the problem had been solved by sending out a chima gana or junior lord who represented the fief-holder. He had lived in the fief and created a set of loyal local followers. At first district heads did the same things. They sent out their own representatives—now called chima—to run the village areas in their district for them. This practice was soon discovered by the British and as early as 1910 was declared illegal, although it continued on until well into the 1930s, and there are even some district heads today who admit they use chima to ensure control of their district. In Chapter 6 we will take up this problem again and examine it in more detail within the organization of the district.

The central government of the emirate has undergone a number of significant changes under colonialism. At first the Shehu collected taxes on settled peoples through the district heads and taxes on nomads through two trusted slave nobles. This proved unsatisfactory to the British who very early in the century changed the system so that each district head was responsible for tax collection on both settled and on nomad populations in his district. This weakened the power of the Shehu, but at the same time (*ca.* 1914) the British began enforcing among themselves the idea that they must deal with the Bornu government through the Shehu and his Council. Thus good or bad reports of the district heads or village area heads had to be officially put through the Shehu giving him a great deal of either protective or punitive power over his district and village chiefs.

After 1914 there was an increasing effort to create a working Council for the Shehu with a modern treasury from which local planning could be financed. Starting with only a few members it has grown slowly through the years to function as a cabinet with a Waziri or chief minister at its helm. Each councilor has a portfolio or Native Authority department, such as Education, Works, Agriculture, and so on, and these have central offices in the capital with representatives spread out in district capitals throughout Bornu. The experience in this twentieth-century emirate has produced Kanuri who now take part in regional and national politics so that men from Bornu sit in Kaduna, Lagos, London, and even at the United Nations in New York.

The movement of fief-holders out into the bush to administer districts produced a district capital where the ajia or district head resides. To this capital he brought his urban followers; and to the village as well came the district judge and his retinue. As the Native Authority departments developed, local representatives of the various civil service departments of the emirate government came out to the district capital as well. This makes the district capital a more complex and urbanized center and has forced the effects of such urbanization to spread widely

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS1

The District Organization

In Bornu the lawan represents a link between the higher political authorities and the ordinary peasant. To the people in the rural areas he is the most apparent and easily reached member of the ruling classes. Their hamlet and ward heads are leaders but only in a local sense, while the lawan represents the authority of the central emirate government since he is officially appointed by this body. To many ordinary villagers the exact nature of the political organization above the level of the lawan is not at all clear. They know that beyond the lawan there is the district head and above him the Shehu of Bornu, but the various councils and agencies of the emirate government are things they know very little about in detail.

In terms of the emirate as a whole, however, the district head and his organization of the district is the pivotal political focus in Bornu. His is the office through which all central government policies from the capital are translated into action at the local level. Conversely, if there are any disturbances, irregularities in tax revenues, increases in crime, migration out of the district, or failure in any policy goals or action programs, it is to the district head that all the agencies at the center turn for an explanation.

To the lowly peasant the district head is a man in another world, a world of awesome power, riches, and courtly life. A lawan may go abroad to oversee a new well in one of his hamlets, or to mark off the boundaries of a new farm plot, or to take a tax census, but the district head rarely ever leaves his compound except for the occasional trip to oversee nomad cattle taxation, or to appear in some local ceremonial, or to attend the Shehu's court in the capital. When he does venture forth, it is a royal sally to the playing of pipes and drums, with a troop of galloping horsemen and servants brandishing swords, spears, and muzzle-loading guns. Today this is being changed somewhat by the motorcar which carries the district head quickly and silently, but district heads can still create quite a stir when they wish to go forth officially among the people.

The district organization is basically quite simple. Each of the twenty-one districts in the emirate is identified by the name of its principal village (in some cases these are quite large towns), and this latter serves as the district capital. In this capital lives the district head and his followers and all the district representatives of the various emirate civil service agencies. These include such installations as a district courthouse for the Alkali (judge) and a primary school formerly up to the end of Standard IV, now almost universally up to secondary school entrance. Formally, the district head is responsible for the administration of all the village areas and any nomadic population that may be living within the confines of the district.

The district head is appointed and installed by the Shehu in consultation with his council and the local representatives of the Northern Nigerian government. Only high ranking men in the state are considered and almost all the present district heads are sons of men who held a similar position. There is a growing tendency to try to get men who have some western education, but as yet many of the present district heads speak no English and have not attended western schools. In

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

larly as his representatives. The wakil also makes regular visits to important emirate leaders and tries to maintain a constant check on political developments in the capital and the emirate as a whole. Through this organization and through the giving of gifts and hospitality to visitors and messengers from the capital, as well as cultivating high placed friends, the district head maintains and builds up a communication network through which he obtains a many-sided picture of events in the capital.

District heads are also linked to the capital by their membership in factions that help to make up the political life of the emirate. In pre-colonial times these factions grew out of the allegiance of nobles to the various segments of the royal lineage. This indeed was the reason the succession disputes to the throne could turn into bloody civil wars. These same traditional factions still exist today, but there have been added new ones which involve close alliances between very powerful men in the emirate government. These reflect the weakened authority of the Shehu, and the increase in power and authority of the Native Authority officials in the top positions of the emirate government. District heads linked to more powerful factions receive better information about the course of emirate politics and more protection when they need it than those related to weak ones. Thus one district head might be linked to a member of the royal family who has no official position in the Native Authority and who has little hope of gaining the throne; another might be closely linked to the Waziri or chairman of the Bornu Native Authority Council. The latter district head, because of his factional membership, is in a much stronger position in the emirate political organization as a whole than is the former. These links to the center both official and unofficial must be carefully developed and maintained by a district head. This is especially true when it is realized that a district head like any other member of the Bornu political system operates within two cultural orientations—one western and the other traditional Kanuri. The district head should give gifts to subordinates, to his faction leaders, and to many other powerful people in the state. From a western point of view these can be seen as bribes, while from a Kanuri vantage point they may be looked upon as obligatory and legitimate recognition by the district head of the power and protection that can be wielded by his superiors in the central government of the emirate. Since such expenses are not provided for in the district head's official salary, the means by which he obtains the wealth to make such gifts often involves breaking rules according to strict western civil service standards, although again such activities might be considered legitimate by local tradition.

The central focus of this behavior revolves around tax collection. The district head is seen in western terms to be an agent of government who collects taxes and is paid a salary for this and other services. However, he needs to maintain a large following who are not provided for by government if he is going to collect nomad cattle taxes. These men must ride out over the entire district—often several thousand square miles—to collect the tax. To keep these men as his tax collectors he needs much more revenue than his own salary. If he does not collect the tax, or enough taxes, he will be punished by dismissal or transfer to a smaller less prestigious district. He has very little choice; in order to keep his own organization going and to maintain friendly contact at the center by gift-giving, he must take some of the district's tax revenue for himself. This makes him vulnerable at all times; to comply with some demands which are deemed important he must break others

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

643 bodied in his title, "commander of the faithful," and is expressed ritually in a number of ways. Thus at the feast celebrating the end of Ramadan (the annual Muslim fast), a special ram of the Shehu is killed by the chief religious leader of the state. No one considering himself a citizen of the emirate and a subject of the Shehu is supposed to kill his own ram for the feast day until the royal ceremony is completed.

643 644 At all annual festivals and state occasions, and every Friday to a lesser extent, the Shehu is attended at his palace by his court and representatives of the people. The court includes members of the royal family, title holders, the Native Authority council members, and any district heads who may be in the capital or their city representatives who sit outside the royal courtroom. Into the royal presence come representatives of each Native Authority department, representatives of the religious leaders of the community, a sample of school children, leaders and representatives of the various occupational groupings under their own headmen. Each group gives symbolic pledges of loyalty and obedience to the throne by saying prayers for the health and welfare of the monarch and the state. The people, including the nobles, go down on their knees to the monarch, stand when he stands, remove their shoes in his presence, and speak to him only indirectly using terms of reverence and respect.

• 64 It is difficult to assess what real power the Shehu has in the emirate government. The present incumbent is a very old man, and for the last decade or so the bulk of administrative affairs have been handled by the Native Authority Council under the direction of the Waziri. Whether this now indicates a trend toward constitutional monarchy or whether a new, younger and more vigorous Shehu would reassert the power of the throne is a question that is fascinating but at present not capable of being answered. Certainly the Native Authority Council and the various departments under the council are new and growing powers in the contemporary society, but the district heads are formally responsible to the Shehu. Since the district heads are still very powerful members of the political system, a new Shehu could conceivably affect policy and the administration of the emirate very considerably through his influence on these men and their appointments. It is also very possible that he would influence the Native Authority Council itself and appointments to that body. Potentially the office is a very powerful one, and it seems unlikely that its power will diminish in future since the instruments of power are available to anyone occupying the throne who wishes to use them.

647 [631] [648] The main business of government of the emirate is handled on a day-to-day basis in the Native Authority departments, which are coordinated with similar departments in other emirates of the province under the Bornu Provincial Government which in its turn looks to the Regional Government of Northern Nigeria for policy directives that are regional in scope.

647 463 [565] [197] The personnel of the Native Authority departments form what has come to be called a new class in the society. They are salaried bureaucrats who work in offices and generally have some form of western education. They wear wrist watches, read English and vernacular newspapers, listen to the radio for both local, national, and international news, go to political meetings, join civil service associations, and think of themselves as urban even when they are stationed in the rural

44 living in Geidam. They are involved in a dried-meat industry,
439 buying beef slaughtered in Geidam, where the price is low, and
563 curing it there. Since the price of cattle shipped south is
[497] raised appreciably by rail costs from nearby Nguru to Lagos,
[498] it is cheaper to cure the meat in Geidam and ship the dried meat directly by truck to southern cities. Rail freight costs are so important that many Fulani herdsmen drive their herds to Kano, some three hundred miles away, to save the freight charges. This does not improve the quality of the beef. There is also
44 439 563 a certain amount of regional trade in dried fish, since fish, too, are plentiful in Geidam. The dried fish trade extends
[494] to Lake Chad, where small communities of Ibos can be found whose livelihood comes from buying dried fish and shipping them south by truck.

D. Political Organization on the Communal Level.

63 Bornu Emirate, the largest part of Bornu Province, is itself divided into twenty-one districts, each with its Ajia.
[162] Geidam is the largest district, with a population of 86,993, covering an area of 2500-3000 square miles. The Ajia of Geidam is Yerima Mustapha, and he resides in the town of Geidam, the largest town in the district and consequently its administrative center.

1. The hierarchy of offices in Geidam.

64 The Bornu Native Authority was theoretically and now is

[GEIDAM]

64 the ruling body in Bornu Emirate. Native Authority (NA) officials, under the overall jurisdiction of the Shehu, are appointed by the Shehu's council (modulas). These include the Ajia, the highest official representing the NA in a district, 634 and all the lesser office-holders in that district. In Geidam District, Yerima Mustapha is the most important political fig- [693] ure. Second in importance to Yerima Mustapha in Geidam is the Alkali of Geidam, Alkali Baba Kura Imambe, who served as Alkali in Geidam for most of the year in which the present [682] study was done, and then was promoted to a higher court. The three Lowans, Lowan Ashek, Lowan Kolo Kolo, and Serekin Garba, Lowan of the Hausa ward, follow. Their jurisdiction is limited to their own wards within the town. Then follow a long list of officials, all NA appointees, each with his own area of specialization: the Chief Scribe, Treasurer, Primary School Headmaster and three teachers, Agricultural expert, Veterinary, Hides and Skins Inspector, Forestry expert, Local Government Advisor, Adult Education Organizer, Dispenser, and Sanitation Inspector. The Chief Scribe and the Treasurer both have assistants. Lowest of the NA officials are the NA messengers. Six NA messengers are attached to the Ajia of Geidam; one NA messenger serves the Alkali.

Most of the officials listed above serve the district of Geidam, though all are permanently stationed in the town. The Ajia and his staff, headed by the Chief Scribe and the Treasurer, are responsible for the administration of the entire dis-

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[554] prestige, and the distinction between slave and free-born.

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648 The direct influence of the British colonial administration has removed the legal support behind the master-slave relationship, so that slaves can no longer be bought and sold, and slaves who have run away cannot be forcibly returned to their masters by the police. This has radically altered the relation between master and slave, so that the distinction between slave and free-born is significant only in special cases.

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565 By and large, the colonial administration, because of its policy of indirect rule, has allowed political power to remain in the hands of the same segments of the society as previously held power. However, some changes have been made by the British, so that representatives are elected to a Northern House of Assembly and to a Federal Legislature. In Geidam,

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565 political power is largely in the hands of the Ajia, who typifies the aristocracy. Yerima Mustapha as Ajia of Geidam is a perfect example of the aristocrat who has skillfully adapted to the changes demanded of a present-day Ajia, and at the same time has succeeded in perpetuating the old social order. Other positions of power such as those of the Lowans, are held by men faithful to him, chosen from his kabuna, another traditional group which has continued on into the present in Geidam. The position of Alkali in Geidam is held by still another member of the aristocracy; and what is more, the Alkali of Geidam, Alkali Baba Kura, was elected representative to the

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634 The District organization is roughly similar throughout the twenty-one such divisions in Borny Emirate. Each District shares the [368] name of its chief town. This town serves as the District capital and houses the DH and his followers, the District representatives of the N.A., a District court house for the Alkali (District judge), and a [491] Junior Primary School. Today most District capitals are connected to the Emirate capital by motor road. Formally, the DH is responsible for the administration of all village areas within the confines of his District.

634 A DH is formally appointed and installed by the Shehu in • 64 consultation with his Council and the Colonial officials. Only high ranking men in the state are considered, and in every case but one, all present DH's are the sons of men who held the same rank. In the contemporary scene British ratification means that the choice must be weighted towards a literate English speaker wherever possible. The Shehu must feel that he is obtaining a loyal follower, and must benefit materially from the choice, by gifts in cash and kind from the would-be DH. (This latter action is illegal and unfortunately there is insufficient information for the writer to make a confident descriptive statement about gift giving by would-be office holders). Finally, the Shehu's Council must be won over or at least some of them, so that they will either support the aspirant or split on their opposition to him.

634 The DH's compound is supplied by the N.A. and is the most [644] impressive building in town. Each DH keeps a compound in Maiduguri, in the Shehuri (palace) ward of the city, with a residing Wakil (Chief follower) who appears at the Shehu's Court to represent his superior at the 634 palace. In the District, the DH maintains a large extended household 571 organization of followers and slaves. These live in contiguous and non-